

# PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 48, “The Obedient Servant,” Part II, Luke 17:7-10

## **THE OBEDIENT SERVANT: LUKE 17:7-10**

1. The p. is a simple three stanza ballad such as we already observed in 11:9-13, 11:29-32, 15:3-7, 16:9-13, (Bailey).

(1) Can you imagine having a servant,  
Plowing or keeping sheep,  
Who on coming into the field  
You say to him, ‘Come at once and recline  
to eat’?

SERVANT  
FULFILLING ORDERS  
ORDERS FULFILLED  
REWARD?

(2) Will he not rather say to him,  
‘prepare for me something and I shall dine,  
And gird yourself to serve me,  
Till I eat and drink;  
And afterward you shall eat and drink’?

SERVE THE MASTER  
THEN YOURSELF

(3) Does the servant have special merit  
Because he did what was commanded?  
So, you, also when you have done what was commanded

SERVANT  
ORDERS FULFILLED  
ORDERS FULFILLED

Say, ‘Nothing is owing us servants, we have one done our duty.’”

REWARD?

2. As the case of Luke 15:3-7, the third stanza is application, yet it deals with a series of themes introduced in the first stanza. These themes (noted on the right) are presented in stanza one and repeated in stanza 3. They will be examined below. In the center are two couplets of parallelism.  
“Prepare for me matches serve me, and I will eat and drink, parallels, you shall eat and drink.” Some of the words in the central stanza seems at first

glance redundant. Thus the RSV has the 1<sup>st</sup> line simply read, 'Prepare supper for me,' condensing two verbs into one. With the extra help each line this central stanza has two verbs. The 3 stanza literary form reinforces Marshall's view that there is no need to identify the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza as redactional. In most of the p. stanzas we study, direct speech occurs at the beginning of the stanza. By contrast here the first and last stanza end with direct speech. Thus the literary form is again complete, artistically satisfying, and provides an important key to interpretation.

3. Before proceeding to the interpretation of the p, we must examine the waiting servants in Luke 12:35-38. Some of the identical occur there and function in reverse of what appears here. It is not our intention to make full study of the p. of the Waiting Servants, but to observe its literary form and the use of its images. The form is as follows;

A. 1 Let your waist be girded	SERVANTS PREPARE
1' and your lamp burning	SERVANTS PREPARE
B. 2 And be like men who are waiting	SERVANTS WAIT TO SERVE
3 for their master to return to the wedding	MASTER COMES
3' So that when he comes and knocks	MASTER COMES
2' immediately they may open to him.	SERVANTS SERVE
C. 4 Blessed are those servants	SERVANTS BLESSED
5 whom the master finds awake.	MASTER COMES
6 Truly I say to you, he will gird himself.	MASTER PREPARES
7 And have them recline at table	SERVANTS HONORED
6' and come and serve them.	MASTER SERVES
5' If (In the 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> watch) he comes and finds thus,	MASTER COMES
4' blessed are those servants	SERVANTS BLESSED

4. In this case the literary form is built on a very sophisticated use of the phenomenon of the split parallelism. If all the repetitions are ignored the seven movements of the p. can be easily identified. They are as follows:
  - a. Servants prepare to serve the master.
  - b. Servants wait to serve the master.
  - c. The master's return is anticipated.
  - d. The servants are blessed in their vigilance.
  - e. The master comes.
  - f. The master prepared and serves the servants.
  - g. The servants reclined to be served.



5. By following the numbers, the flow can be easily traced. Each line/idea, except 7, is repeated. A prosaic telling of these same servant ideas without the parallel repetitions would repeat as follows. Prepare Yourselfs –(1), Wait to serve-(2), Your returning master-(3), You are blessed- (4), If the master comes and finds you awake-(5), For then he will gird himself to serve you-(6), while you recline-(7). The extra words are redundant, but part of the literary form. The split parallelism is a literary device found mainly in the OT. Freedman writes, “It is though the poet deliberately split a couplet, and inserted a variety of materials between the opening and closing halves of the unit to form a stanza.” A clear case of this in the NT is the Lucan Beatitudes, Luke 6:20-26 (Bailey). There a very precise series of four couplets are formed with the key words, “Blessed and “for,” that is; *Blessed* are the poor *for* yours is the Kingdom of God.
6. The text has three couplets structured in this fashion, but the fourth of this series has some extra material inserted in between the 1s and 2<sup>nd</sup> lines of the couplet, This is a follows;  
“*Blessed* are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil.  
On account of the *Son of man*. Rejoice in that day and reap with joy, for your reward is in heaven. *For* so their fathers did to the prophets.”  
This couplet is intact. Yet extra material is added in the middle. At the same time this extra material in the center is ordered according to a precise pattern. There are three negatives matched by three positives and a reference to the Son of man in the center. This can be seen as follows:  
“Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you  
And revile you, And cast out your name as evil,  
On account of the son of man, Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy,  
For your reward is great in heaven;  
For so their fathers did to the prophets.”
7. Thus this text is clearly a NT example of the phenomenon Freedman has identified in the OT. A two line parallelism has been split, and in this case seven lines added in the center. These seven lines have a literary form of their own with a climax in the middle. Thus the larger text has four couplets and the fourth is split to make up a stanza.

8. Here in Luke 12:35-38 we have this remarkable case of this phenomenon happening twice in a row. The first couplet is a simple synonymous parallelism.

Let your waist be girded,  
And you lamp burning,

SERVANTS PREPARE  
SERVANTS PREPARE

The first of these two images has to do with being prepared to undertake any strenuous task. The servant must put on a belt and tuck his long, loose fitting outer garment into that belt to the edge of the garment out of the way. The 2<sup>nd</sup> has to do with preparing the master out of the dark. Only if one has lived in a world w/o electricity it is possible to appreciate how important it is to prepare and light the lamps before dark. When we compare Stanza A and stanza B it is clear that the reference to the servants (with their preparation and wait) is repeated on the outside (2) and new material referring to the mast is inserted in the center. This can be seen as follows:

*Stanza A*

1 Let your *waist be girded*

1' and your *lamp burning*

The servant girds his waist in preparation (1) and waits for his orders from the mast on his return (2). The lighting of the lamps (1') is for the purpose of opening the door for him with the lamp in hand (2'). Thus two line have been expanded into four by repeating the basic ideas (which have to do with the servants) and inserted between them two lines (which have to do with the master). Then, remarkably, the process is repeated. Now the four lines are restated (in slightly different form) and gain new material is inserted into the center. The matching nature of stanza B and the four outside lines of stanza C can be seen as follows:

*Stanza B*

1 Be like *men waiting*  
3 for the *master* to return  
3' so that when *he comes*  
2' *they may open* to him

*Stanza B*

And be like men who are *waiting*  
(a couplet on the master's return)  
immediately they may *open* to him.

*Stanza C*

4 Blessed are *those servants*.  
5 *coming the master* finds awake.  
5' If *he comes* and finds thus  
4' blessed are *those servants*.

The outside lines tell of the servants who wait (2) to open (2) and who are thereby blessed (4,4') All four inner lines talk of the coming of the master.